

**Testimony of Congressman Dennis Cardoza**  
**Natural Resources Subcommittee on Water and Power**  
**February 4, 2010**

**\* As Prepared for Delivery \***

Thank you, Madam Chairwoman for holding this hearing and inviting me to testify. As this Subcommittee knows, the California water crisis has had a devastating effect on my district and the San Joaquin Valley.

My constituents – my friends and neighbors – need water desperately and what has become of the area is nothing short of an economic disaster. Unemployment rates and foreclosures in the Central Valley are among the highest in the country.

The three biggest cities in my district, Merced, Stockton, and Modesto, have the 2nd, 6th, and 7th highest foreclosure rates in the country, respectively. These cities also rank in the top seven cities nationwide for unemployment rates, and Merced now ranks #2 nationwide. Entire counties are near 20% unemployment and some small farm-dependent communities on the west side have unemployment rates of over 40 percent!

That is why I am here today. In the Central Valley and California in general, there have been too many fights over water: how to get it, how to move it, how to use it. The government has installed so many restrictions and impediments that farmers have been backed into a corner and can't get out.

This bill, HR 4225, is a step toward introducing flexibility back into the system and returning sanity to a debate that has veered dangerously off course.

This bill, introduced by my colleague Jim Costa and myself, addresses one of the biggest challenges to implementing water projects in California: money. Many of the projects that could free up water and protect the environment while providing relief for thousands of Valley citizens cost money that the local towns, water districts, and municipalities just don't have.

A prime example is the Patterson Irrigation District's proposed project to install fish screens and piping on a diversion of the San Joaquin River. The project will provide protection for migrating fish species and maintain water rights so that diversions may continue even when the listed species are in the vicinity of the diversion. These projects were granted a Mitigated Negative Declaration and Finding of No Significant Impact. All environmental and construction permits have been issued.

The project is 100% ready to go. Construction could start as early as this summer. This is a win-win! The best part is that it is expected to provide 115,000 acre feet of water per year to the Westside of the San Joaquin Valley.

The problem: a \$7 million budget gap and a federal law that prohibits the federal government from assisting in worthwhile projects in desperate areas. We need to give the Bureau of Reclamation the flexibility to solve problems and not create more impediments to success.

Last year, the Valley was given 10% of its water allocation. This year, despite the recent heavy rains, the allocation is expected to be much lower. The devastation in the Valley is at a level equal to the devastation suffered by New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina and we need your help.

Frankly, by not dealing with this growing problem sooner, we have created a problem of even bigger proportion. Not only is the Central Valley hurting, but our neighbors to the South are also suffering the repercussions of this failure to act.

But the reality is that my constituents can no longer wait for assistance. They need relief now. It is time we do a better job managing our California water resources and this progress is an important step in that direction.

Thank you.